

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Eagle Butte School
other name/site number: 24CH1118

2. Location

street & number: Eagle Butte School Road, 23 miles off State Highway 80 not for publication: n/a
city/town: Fort Benton vicinity: X
state: Montana code: MT county: Chouteau code: 015 zip code: 59446

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally.

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

Montana State Historic Preservation Office

State or Federal agency or bureau

(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

 entered in the National Register

 see continuation sheet

 determined eligible for the National Register

 see continuation sheet

 determined not eligible for the National Register

 see continuation sheet

 removed from the National Register

 see continuation sheet

 other (explain):

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property: public-State

Category of Property: building

Number of contributing resources previously
listed in the National Register: n/a

Name of related multiple property listing: n/a

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u>1</u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:
EDUCATION/schoolhouse

Current Functions:
VACANT

7. Description

Architectural Classification:
Late 19th and Early 20th Century American Movements
Craftsman

Materials:
foundation:
walls: WOOD/clapboard
roof: WOOD/shingles
other:

Narrative Description

Eagle Butte School is located amid the grassy plains and rolling agricultural lands of west-central Montana, just a few miles south of the Missouri River. The Eagle Butte School site, includes one building and one structure: the schoolhouse, with its attached “teacherage”, and a freestanding cistern. An outhouse was part of the original site but has since been removed or destroyed; all that remains is a square impression 8’ x 2’ deep.¹

The exterior dimensions of the schoolhouse, without the teacher’s residence, are 40’ 2” long x 20’ wide and 25’ high. The schoolhouse’s wooden frame rests on a mortar foundation of cobble and sedimentary quartzite. The walls are whitewashed lap-board siding and the 4:12 pitch roof is covered with tongue and groove boards onto which wooden shingles were laid. The main entry is at the north elevation; four steps and a mortar stoop introduce the entryway which is flanked by double-hung windows to its right and left. A 10’ wooden flagpole crowns the roof above the north entrance. The western elevation has four double-hung windows slightly off-centered and grouped toward the south; however, the eastern elevation has no windows whatsoever. Although the State Departments of Health and Public Instruction preferred that the windows be on the eastern wall, having the windows on the western wall was still acceptable as long as there were “two large unbroken walls for blackboard space.”² The southern elevation is covered by the teacher’s lodgings.³

(see continuation sheet)

¹ Patrick Rennie, *Eagle Butte School Restoration*, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Historic Cultural Resource Site Form, 2003, Helena, MT, pg. 1-3.

² W.R. Plew, 1919 One and Two Room Rural School Buildings, University of Montana Bulletin, *State College Series No. 11*. Prepared for The State Departments of Health and Public Instruction, pg. 24.

³ Rennie, 1-3.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A; C

Areas of Significance: EDUCATION; ARCHITECTURE

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): n/a

Period(s) of Significance: 1915-1965

Significant Person(s): n/a

Significant Dates: 1915, 1925, 1965

Architect/Builder: n/a

Cultural Affiliation: n/a

Narrative Statement of Significance

The Eagle Butte School is eligible for listing in the National Register under criterion A because it represents "events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history." The one room schoolhouse was a phenomenon, of the late 19th, early 20th century, that was once common throughout settlement communities of the West. It was often a symbol of permanence. "...the one-room schoolhouse was the earliest visible evidence that community concern had shifted from sheer survival to a common rationale of cultural betterment: the key to setting down the roots of success and opportunity was education."⁴ The Eagle Butte School was significant at the local level acting not only as a school but also as an events center.

The Eagle Butte Schoolhouse is equally significant at the local and statewide level for its architectural values. It is a well-preserved example of early 20th century school design and eclectic Craftsman style. The building is prototypical of a modified "Plan C1" design described and recommended by W. R. Plew for the Montana State Departments of Health and Public Instruction. For these associations, the Eagle Butte Schoolhouse is eligible for the listing in the National Register of Historic Places under to Criterion C.

Fort Benton History:

Thomas Hart Benton was a man of burly build and fiery temperament. Born in North Carolina in 1782, he distinguished himself as an aide-de-camp to General Andrew Jackson during the War of 1812. Much to his disappointment, he never saw any military action. An insult to his brother Jesse, led Benton to attack Jackson in Nashville's City Hotel.

As Theodore Roosevelt put it: "The details were so intricate that probably not even the participants themselves knew exactly what had taken place, while all the witnesses impartially contradicted each other and themselves. At any rate, Jackson was shot and Benton was pitched headlong downstairs, and all the other combatants were more or less damaged.' While Jackson was carried off for medical attention, Benton seized the General's sword and ceremoniously broke it over his knee. Shortly thereafter, the Benton brothers beat a hasty, but prudent, retreat to Missouri."⁵

The move to Missouri was a turning point in Benton's social and political life. His work in journalism, law and politics made him the most influential man in the state and one of the most influential men in the country. Elected to represent Missouri in the Senate from 1821-1852, Benton proved himself to be a capable, loyal and rowdy leader. By this time, Benton was one of President Jackson's most ardent supporters.

(see continuation sheet)

⁴ E.L. Ditzler, *Montana Schools*, vol. 28 no. 4.

⁵ *Benton County Washington*, http://www.co.benton.wa.us/html/thomas_hart_benton.htm, April 12, 2005.

Eagle Butte School

Name of Property

Chouteau County, MT

County and State

9. Major Bibliographic References

(see continuation sheet)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

☐ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other
Specify Repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: less than one acre

UTM References: Zone 12 Easting 562,052 Northing 5,303,930

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): NW-NW-NW-NE ¼ of section 34; T25N, R12E

Verbal Boundary Description: The site is contained within an area that measures ca. 150 ft. N/S by 35 ft. E/W. This rectangle is centered on UTM Point 562052E, 5303930N (Zone 12, NAD 27).

Boundary Justification: Site boundaries arbitrarily established based on the visible extent of cultural materials and cultural features on the ground surface that are associated with the Eagle Butte School.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Patrick Rennie; Rachel Manley
organization: DNRC; MTSHPO
street & number: (1625 11th Ave.; 1410 8th Ave.)
city or town: Helena state: MT

date: March 2005
telephone: ((406) 444-2882; (406) 444-3647)
zip code: 59620

Property Owner

name/title: State of Montana-DNRC
street & number: (1625 11th Ave.)
city or town: Helena state: MT

telephone: ((406) 444-2882)
zip code: 59620

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Description of Resources

The interior of the schoolhouse is a simple three-room affair: a classroom and two cloakrooms (one for the boys and one for the girls). The cloakrooms are to the right and left of the main entry. They measure 8' long by 6' 3' wide. The eastern cloakroom is painted a lackluster pink like the rest of the schoolhouse walls but the western cloakroom is painted a mint green. The main part of the building consists of the classroom measuring 30' 10" long and 19' 3" wide. The floors are hardwood and the 10' pink walls and white ceiling are painted plaster. Pink was not the recommended color for the walls; "the best wall color for school rooms is a sort of greenish gray, more gray than green."⁶ There are two chalkboards, one on the eastern wall of the classroom that is 3' high x 25' long and another on the south wall that is 3' high and 15' 7" long. This chalkboard was to be situated behind the teacher's desk, in keeping with established standards of the day, and itemized later in the C1 design described by Plew. Bookshelves in the NW corner complement the educatory atmosphere. Toward the north end of the building there is a red-brick chimney that has been plastered over but was once used in conjunction with a wood stove. The schoolhouse is wired for electricity; two fluorescent lights hang from the ceiling and multiple electrical outlets are located throughout the building. Prior to electric wiring, wood stoves were used for heat.⁷

A second chimney is centrally located in the "teacherage" at the south end of the building. The interior entrance to this part of the building is at the southeast corner of the classroom. The external dimensions of the teacherage are 12' 3" long x 20' wide with 8' walls. The roofing material and pitch are identical to that of the main part of the building as are the exterior walls. This attachment is divided into two rooms 11' 10" long (N/S) x 9' 6" wide (E/W). Looking south, the left hand room is a kitchen area, accessible from the classroom, and like the cloakroom at the opposite end, it is painted mint green. The room on the right is the bedroom and is painted the same pink as the rest of the building. There are two double-hung windows on the south wall, one for each room. There is another window, double-hung, on the western wall and one on the eastern wall next to the southeast entrance.⁸

The final feature of the site is the cistern located on the southeastern side of the building approximately 8' from the SE entrance. The actual cistern is 4' in diameter, made of concrete, and holds about 200 gallons of water. The cistern is enclosed in a wooden shack with lap-board siding, and a gabled roof. It was originally painted white. The door is on the south side. The enclosing structure is 3' 3" long x 3' 3" wide x 7' 9" high.

⁶ Plew, 14.

⁷ Rennie, 1-3; Plew, 24.

⁸ Rennie, 6-7.

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Fort Benton, like its namesake, Senator Benton, was known for its rowdiness. The town was established in 1846-47 by Alexander Culbertson of the American Fur Company and located in the Missouri River Valley in North Central Montana, about 40 miles northeast of Great Falls. Fort Benton was a bustling steamboat port and a community known for the roughness of its residents; Front Street, facing the Missouri River, was known as "the Bloodiest Block in the West."⁹

Despite its unpleasant reputation, signs of permanence and stability soon appeared. Forts "foretold of larger communities and strange lifestyles spelling doom for nomadic ways of life."¹⁰ During the gold rush of the 1860s, the first school in the area was constructed (1868). Unfortunately, the school lasted only three years. A second, more successful attempt was made in 1873. The school on Main Street, district #1, boasted 25 students. In 1887, the section of the Great Northern Railroad passing through Fort Benton was completed, adding more to the town's prosperity.

While Fort Benton flourished, the American Fur Company did not. In 1865, the company closed and sold the fort to the United States military. In 1869, the gold rush ended and by 1875, the military had abandoned the fort.

Gold mining slowed considerably by 1870 but several of the established business concerns continued in Fort Benton for several years because the raising of livestock began on a large scale in the territory and soon small grains were raised for food and hay and the trading with the Indians and trappers continued.¹¹

Toward the end of the 19th century, the fur and mining era was waning and the homesteading era was waxing. "Gradually law and order replaced lawlessness and ranchers and farmers occupied the plains and Fort Benton became the hub for one of the largest wheat producing areas in the state."¹² This homesteading boom from 1906-1918 saw the creation of smaller communities around Fort Benton.

Triggered by the Enlarged Homestead Act passed by Congress in 1909 and the promotional material promoting the wonders (mostly agricultural) of Montana, a flood of immigrants came to the state beginning in 1909...between 1900 and 1910, the population of the U.S. increased by 21 percent, while the population of Montana increased by 54 percent.¹³

Eagle Butte Community History:

The community of Eagle Butte was settled approximately 22 miles northeast of Fort Benton on the Missouri River; it was named for Eagle Butte, a local landmark noted for its large population of eagles. This small community was a quintessential example of an early 20th century homesteading community. Many homesteaders were drawn to Eagle Butte by the prospect of free land, larger land grants and the promise of agricultural success:

In 1909 Congress passed a Western land act that was called the Enlarged Homestead Act. It increased the acreage one could hold from 160 to 320 acres. This was a marvelous temptation to farmers particularly those familiar with the rich farm lands of the Midwest and the east....What a wonderful country Montana seemed. In 1911 pictures of

⁹ Mike Whye, "Holding the Forts", 14, *Fort Benton, Montana (1)*, vertical file, Montana Historical Society, April 14, 2005.

¹⁰ Whye, 12.

¹¹ http://cowboynpplowboys.com/ft_city.htm, April 14, 2005.

¹² *Fort Benton, Montana: A National Historic Landmark*, www.fortbenton.com, April 14, 2005.

¹³ Katherine Mitchell, *Rediscovering Montana, The Expedition of 1910*, The Expedition's Home Page, http://www.edheritage.org/HE_03win/1910.html, April 14, 2005.

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wheat fields and flax fields filled the papers—advertisements of the opportunities for people who would come to fill this land.¹⁴

Due to the homesteading boom, Montana in the early 20th century saw not only an influx of men but of their families as well. The Eagle Butte community is likely to have risen as a result of this influx. While the founders of the community are unknown, Montana Land Tract records from the late 19th to the early 20th century show that dozens of families filed claims on the 36 sections of Township 25N Range 12E between 1906-1918.

The first claim to the land in the area of Eagle Butte was in 1897; by 1913, the area's population had increased significantly enough to warrant the building of a Post Office. The first postmaster was John Zimmer. A major boost in population occurred during the homesteading boom between 1910 and 1917—at least nine families came to Eagle Butte. One such family, the Brewers arrived between 1910 and 1913. Mr. Jim Brewer was chairman of the committee responsible for constructing a community hall. Built around 1913, the hall was named Eagle Butte Community Hall and was used for local affairs like dances, Sunday school, box suppers and socials.¹⁵

The building of the community hall revealed the amity among homesteading families. Rendering service to another was no outlandish occurrence: Anna Brewer and a few others had to go around asking for donations to fund the hall building project; when needed, homesteaders housed their neighbors who were facing hard times. This does not mean there were no conflicts:

One time the neighbors were helping Fred Van Doren to thresh his wheat. Dode Van Doren was one of the best cooks around and everyone greatly appreciated her pies especially. Came dinner time and she had chocolate pie for dessert which was making everyone's mouth water. Albert Tonne ate his piece and looked over at Otis Weible's piece [and saw] that he hadn't eaten yet and said 'If you don't mind, I'll eat yours,' and he did. Otis was so mad he didn't speak to Albert for 2 years.¹⁶

Despite their small population and isolated location, Eagle Butte residents had access to most of what they needed in Virgelle, across the Missouri River to the north, or in Fort Benton and Geraldine to the southwest. According to the Eagle Butte populace, lumber, coal and supplies came from Virgelle, people came from Fort Benton, and mail came from Geraldine.

The start of war in Europe (1914) led to an immense increase in the price of wheat. Scott and Margaret Crichton, having arrived in 1916, reminisced about their first year in Montana, it "was overwhelming, such crops, scatter a little wheat on the ground and harvest a 40 bu. per acre crop. Every one had the best piece of land in the country."¹⁷

Unfortunately, this boom did not last. Drought followed rain; crops failed; homesteads burned and people left. Homesteaders enticed by boosterism about the fertile lands of Montana saw their investments literally blown away by the dry wind. Historian Joseph Kinsey Howard described the continuing disaster:

In the spring of 1920, however, it rained...but the rain stopped and the wind came. These winds were the first "dusters" the northern plains farmer had ever seen. Day after day he watched, first incredulous, then despairing, as the gale whipped his fields into the sky...The ruined homesteaders gathered in little groups in the towns to compare notes...the fourth dry year, and now the wind! Nothing like it had happened before...But the stockmen grinned wryly, knowing it had happened before and would happen again...¹⁸

¹⁴ Geraldine Bicentennial Committee, *Spokes, Spurs and Cockleburs*, Fort Benton, Montana (River Press Publishing Company, 1976), 292.

¹⁵ *Spokes, Spurs and Cockleburs*, 293.

¹⁶ *Spokes, Spurs and Cockleburs*, 297.

¹⁷ *Spokes, Spurs and Cockleburs*, 295.

¹⁸ Joseph Kinsey Howard, *Montana: High Wide and Handsome*, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press/Bison Books, 2001), 202.

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By the early 1920s, over 11,000 Montana farms “blew away,” leaving more than 40,000 people in eastern and central Montana destitute. Some farmers turned to the towns for alternate employment; others moved on to more fertile locales out of state. Compounding the natural disasters were the strains on the national economy following World War I, and the resultant constriction of extractive industries in Montana, such as logging and mining. This combination of factors resulted in a keen economic depression that brought “upon the State and its banking structure an almost complete breakdown.” Between 1919 and 1925, fifty percent of Montana homesteaders lost their land as the value of their land decreased by fifty percent.¹⁹

Members of the Eagle Butte community felt the depression intensely. Bradley Clark, one of Eagle Butte’s residents since 1915 said:

The bust came hard and, indeed, was so hard because of a misunderstanding of this country. Completely forgotten was that drought comes as often as rain. In 1917 the rains quit and resemblance of hell began. There were prairie fires, grasshoppers, worms, wind and no rain. To add to the pain the price of wheat dropped and continued to drop. The suffering was monumental. Of the 80,000 homesteaders to come to Montana between 1900 and 1917, 60,000 fled the state. Some stayed away forever. Some retained their dream, went away only to feed themselves. They returned again and again over the years only to be forced out one more time.²⁰

Despite the depression, some homesteaders returned to Eagle Butte with true Montana grit, determined to tame the wild land.

With the help of God and their friends and neighbors they did make it. They bought land for taxes, a few cattle and they learned to adapt. The rains came and stayed. There grew a respect for the land that shows in the very being of these people today. They love Montana and have a firm belief that no better people exist in the world than those in Montana....They are the Montana homesteaders. They are Montana.²¹

The 1930s census lists twelve households in Eagle Butte Township, with only five families with school age children. Those that stayed on through the 1930s were rewarded after World War II, when the rains and relative economic prosperity returned. . The community pulled out of the depression, and followed a familiar pattern of reinvigoration during the post-war boom in agricultural economy after World War II.

Eagle Butte School History:

One need only be reminded of Winslow Homer’s painting *Crack the Whip* or of the playful schoolday pranks of Mark Twain’s characters Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer, to recognize the power of the one-room school image in American culture. To the western frontier settlements, however, the rural school was much more than a nostalgic heirloom of Americana—it was a potent message carrier of progress.²²

On July 12, 1899, 160 acres of section 34 of T25N R12E was “[s]elected by [the] State for Schools.”²³ Noted architectural historian, Kingston Heath writes: “The presence of the schoolhouse, then, represents the stability left behind, the practical necessities of the present, the hopes and aspiration of the future.”²⁴

¹⁹Clarence W. Groth, *Montana Banking History 1864-1954*, Helena Branch of the Federal Reserve Bank, (Helena Montana: Montana Historical Society, June 1955) 42-3; Michael Malone, Richard B. Roeder, and William L. Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, rev. ed. (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1991), 283.

²⁰ *Spokes, Spurs and Cockleburs*, 293.

²¹ *Spokes, Spurs and Cockleburs*, 294.

²² Kingston Heath, *A Dying Heritage: One-Room Schools of Gallatin County, Montana*, Eagle Butte School File (State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, Montana, April 19, 2005), 201.

²³ Montana Tract Books 45, MF 496, Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana, April 19, 2005.

²⁴ Heath, 201.

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The Eagle Butte school district, number 14, appeared in the Superintendent's records in December of 1912. Since the North Eagle Butte schoolhouse was not constructed until 1915-1916, it is assumed that the 27 students in the district met in someone's home or in a structure not worthy of being called a schoolhouse. According to Dale Apple, an Eagle Butte resident since 1912, it was both: "School was held one or two months during the summer in the shacks of the Homesteaders who could not take it and left."²⁵

The superintendent's entry in August 1913 shows that though a satisfactory schoolhouse was lacking, a decent teacher was not.

Visited Dist 14.

Miss Mary Pemberton

[T]eacher [h]olding school in shack. Miss Pemberton has good manner with pupils. Pupils bright and interested. Having two schools in Dist. 14 on account of distance.²⁶

The two schools mentioned above were South Eagle Butte and the North Eagle Butte. South Eagle Butte was located approximately 2 miles south of North Eagle Butte. It is likely that Miss Pemberton taught at both schools. Like many rural schools in homesteading communities, the North Eagle Butte School had problems with finances, low attendance, and persuading teachers to come despite the pitiful salary.

In 1915, the community rallied to construct a new schoolhouse with an attached teacherage. The first to teach in the new schoolhouse was Lulu McKenney. According to the *Teacher's Reports to County Superintendent at Close of School*, the North Eagle Butte School did not have a library, a globe, or any International dictionaries; 13 students between the ages of 6 and 15 were enrolled; and Miss McKenney's salary was \$65 a month.²⁷ By 1917, Miss McKenney had moved to South Eagle Butte where she was described by the Superintendent: "Miss McK. is a splendid little teacher [...] has a large enrollment and has wonderful enthusiasm in her school."²⁸

Miss Mazie Hunt followed Miss McKenney as the teacher at the North Eagle Butte School. However, the Superintendent's assessment of her was less than satisfactory. "Nice building, pupils not interested, discipline poor. Miss Hunt lacks force—afraid of her authority. Would not advised [sic] retaining her services."²⁹

The next teachers were Ms. Mildred Hoffman who taught only four months and Miss Esther V. Holt. During the school year of 1917-1918, the beginning of the drought, 25 students were enrolled. This year's enrollment was one of the peaks during the school's fifty-year history. Miss Holt earned \$85 a month and the school was equipped with a library of 28 books, one globe, nine maps, and one International dictionary. The Superintendent had this to say of Miss Holt: "Miss Holt is unusually good and will not [sic] doubt be in graded work soon as she is very ambitious. Would that we might have our best teachers in rural schools."³⁰

In 1919, student enrollment dropped to 19. Ms. Martine was paid \$90 a month but this was not enough to entice her to remain. By 1920, the North Eagle Butte School had a new teacher, Ms. Zoa Hicks. Enrollment remained at 19 but Ms. Hicks' salary increased to \$100 a month. It was likely her 18 years of teaching experience and the need for a rural teacher that explain for this increase. However, Ms. Hicks taught at the school only a year.

²⁵ There is a discrepancy between local accounts and the Trustees Reports as to when the North Eagle Butte School was actually constructed. Dale Apple says it was built in 1915 but the Trustees Reports indicate construction in 1916. The Trustees Reports can be found at the courthouse in Fort Benton, Montana while Mr. Apple's account can be found in *Spokes, Spurs and Cockleburs*, 289; *Spokes, Spurs and Cockleburs*, 289.

²⁶ *County Superintendents Records* (Fort Benton, Montana), 200.

²⁷ Lulu McKenney, *Teacher's Reports To County Superintendent at Close of School*, Eagle Butte School District #14, November 1915-July 1916.

²⁸ *County Superintendents Records*, 374.

²⁹ *County Superintendents Records*, 357.

³⁰ *County Superintendents Records*, 427.

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Ms. Hicks' report to the county superintendent contained a daily schedule showing that every minute from 9am to 4pm was carefully planned. Subject matter covered included: Numbers, arithmetic, word sounding, writing, reading, language, oral hygiene, history, and spelling. There were two 15-minute recesses and an hour lunch break at noon. A flag salute at 4pm was followed by class dismissal.³¹

Ms. Georgia Bockenkamp came onto the scene in 1920. Despite only six years of teaching experience and only a high school degree, her salary was raised to \$125 a month, still a pathetic sum.³² Enrollment was down to nine students. Ms. Bockenkamp stayed at North Eagle Butte for another year. Her salary was increased to \$135 and one student was added to her roster. These low attendance numbers are indicative of the devastating effects of drought and economic depression on this small community.

In 1921, Mrs. H.C. Clay taught at the North Eagle Butte School. She was also paid \$135 a month though she too only had about six years of experience. During the school year of 1921-1922, enrollment was at an all-time high of 29 students. In 1923, Ms. Henriette Gebhart taught eight pupils for three months. Her salary was only \$85 a month. Ms. Anna J. Jones followed her. Attendance was down to nine again. Ms. Jones was paid \$110 a month.

The Trustees Reports from 1924 show that two schoolhouses were in use in District 14 but that in 1925, only one schoolhouse was in use. "The South Eagle Butte [S]chool ceased to function and the North Eagle Butte School was later designated the Eagle Butte School."³³ The merger may have been due to low attendance was caused by the drought during the 1920s.

Following the Trustees Reports, one sees a continuing decline in attendance; in 1928, 10 students attended the Eagle Butte School. In 1930 only 5 were enrolled. In 1941, there were 19 students in District 14, in 1946, 18. Waning enrollment was not unique to Chouteau County; Kinston Heath's history of rural schools in Gallatin county says, "[m]odernization of farming techniques and the introduction of the automobile generated a migration of small farming families to urban areas. The one-room schools thus faced declining enrollment, which caused many of them to be closed or abandoned during the 1940s and 1950s."³⁴

In 1959, the question of whether or not to annex School District 14 into Geraldine's School District 44 was raised. In that same year, a vote was taken; of the 16 who voted, 7 were for annexation and 9 were against annexation. One of those involved in the voting process was Rae Tonne, daughter of Albert Edward Tonne, an Eagle Butte resident since 1917.

Despite the vote to preserve School District 14, the question of annexation was not abandoned. On July 1, 1965, the County Superintendent of Schools, Margaretha Thomas wrote:

TO WHO IT MAY CONCERN:

School District No. 14, of Chouteau County, Montana, having been abandoned by operation of law and said abandonment being hereby declared as required by law, the territory formerly constituting said school district No. 14, of Chouteau County, Montana, is hereby declared annexed to School District No. 44, Geraldine Elementary.³⁵

From its construction in 1915, the height of the homesteading boom, to its gradual decline during the persistent droughts, the North Eagle Butte Schoolhouse has served the community of Eagle Butte, as a school, as an events center, and as a Sunday school locus. It symbolizes western settlement during the early 20th century homesteading boom and the local history of education. Additionally, the

³¹ Zoa Hicks, *Teacher's Reports to County Superintendent*, Eagle Butte School District #14, May 1919.

³² According to *School Bulletin*, published by the State Department of Public Instruction in Helena, Montana in 1920, the salaries for rural schoolteachers averaged \$800 a year. This income fell below that earned by cigar stand girls, dish-washers, waitresses, common laborers and laundry-washers.

³³ Rennie, 1.

³⁴ Heath, 201.

³⁵ Margaretha Thomas, County Superintendent of Schools, Chouteau County, Fort Benton, Montana, letter, July 1965.

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building is an important example of the standardization of school house design. Indeed, it is a prototypical example of the "Plan C1" design for rural schools set by the Departments of Health and Public Instruction in 1919. The Eagle Butte Schoolhouse still stands as a testament to the tragic and triumphant but always challenging lives of Montana homesteaders and their families.

Architectural Significance

National Trends in School Architecture

(taken from Architectural Historian Paul C. Diebold's excellent *Indiana's Public Common and High Schools MPD*, available online at: <http://www.in.gov/dnr/historic/adobepdf/schoolsmpdf.pdf>.)

Few cultural icons so completely illustrate and embody the historical trend that created them as the one-room school. A basic definition of the one-room school is a one story building, made for educational purposes, with only one classroom. Incidental storage rooms were often part of the floor plan. Most existing one-room schools date from the 1852-1910 period and reflect both vernacular and architect-style influences. One-room schools developed out of the vernacular building traditions of Anglo-American settlers. The same gable roofed, rectangular box with a temple-front orientation was used in churches, schools, town halls, and other public or semi-public buildings on the frontier. Its origins can be found in the simple proportions of the single-pen house, however, the change in orientation to a front gabled form was likely a functional consideration, allowing the main room to remain a single large volume with uniform window distribution. The symmetrical gable-front box also probably appealed to citizens and builders because it approximated a classical appearance. During the settlement era in Montana, the gable-front schoolhouse remained a dominant form.

The gable-front school began as a vernacular tradition, but architects latched onto the form by the mid-19th century and propagated it in building pattern books. Samuel Sloan published a design for a twelve room brick classical gable fronted school in his 1852 Model Architect. Sloan's design was a multiplicative expansion of the one-room school. James J. Johnson's School-Houses of 1871 featured school houses by S.E. Hewes. Despising the one-room schools of previous generations, Hewes recommended updated designs with antechambers for storage and cloakrooms. Several of Hewes' plans were gable-front schools, while others were T-shaped or had other configurations and stylish Gothic or Italianate decoration. The State Superintendent's office did not recommend exterior treatments, other than to say they should be substantial and well built. The 1875 Report did include a recommended floor plan, a simple box with ante rooms for the entrance and cloakrooms. This plan conforms to a gable-fronted exterior by way of its window and door placement. The 1875 plan featured a heating stove, along with a discussion of proper ventilation for schools. Large windows were thought to be important not only for light, but for ridding schools of stale (exhaled) air. Stoves often did not pull fresh air from the outside to heat.

Siting was a very significant part of planning a schoolhouse. Land near the highest number of intended pupils was essential. Beyond this, builders gave careful planning to window placement in relation to natural light. Flanks of gable-front schools had banks of large double-hung windows, so that lighting typically came from due east or due west. 19th century educators believed that cross lighting was harmful to the eye. Some planners or trustees understood the benefits of steady northern facing natural light and oriented schools to have a bank of windows facing north. Without exception, one-room schools were placed to be square with the cardinal compass points. Unless site constrictions necessitated it, schools were usually set back from the road and provisions were usually made for a playground.

The considerations for standard schoolhouse design, then, were well established and widely available to communities by the turn of the twentieth century. Though the State of Montana did not regulate school architecture until 1919, it did so using the priorities outlined in nation-wide plan books and embodied in the Eagle Butte School.

Schools in Montana

The first public school districts in Montana Territory were established in 1866. The early schoolhouses were rough buildings, often of log construction, poorly lit and heated, with no running water. Compulsory attendance legislation was passed in 1887 although it was impractical and often impossible to enforce in rural areas. Records in 1901 indicate there were 182 rural schools in Montana, but that the average attending stood at less than 8 children per school. Beginning in 1902, the Superintendent of Public Instruction requested legislative assistance for transporting rural students and consolidating single room schools into larger, more inclusive programs. By

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1906, standardized courses of study for Montana elementary and secondary schools were adopted widely. A movement to replace early log school buildings with frame, brick or stone gained momentum through the early years of the 20th century.

Under state school law, the secretary of the State Board of Health was mandated to issue “suggestive plans for rural school buildings”, and in 1919, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction May Trumper wrote

With the rapid increase of population in Montana and the correspondingly large number of new school buildings being erected each year, it has become imperative that increased attention should be given to the furnishing of plans and specifications particularly for our smaller types of school buildings.³⁶

Superintendent Trumper introduced the work of architect W.R. Plew, Professor of Architectural and Civil Engineering at the State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts at Bozeman, who had compiled over two years a series of one and two room school building plans with “up to date suggestions regarding the best types of buildings and detail directions for their constructions.”³⁷ Designed between 1917-1919, the building plans exemplify detailing of the Craftsman Style, then in vogue, and incorporate such recommendations as site selection, natural fitness, size of grounds, sanitation, layout, and site beautification. On the interior, optimal lighting, blackboard placement, heating, desk arrangements, etc. are all discussed.

Though constructed in 1915, before Plew’s report was issued, the Eagle Butte School is a fine representative of the philosophy and design recommendations from which of the State Departments of Health and Public Instruction, and architect W.R. Plew drew. Incorporating the ideals exemplified in Plew’s modified Plan C1 school building plan, the Eagle Butte School demonstrates aspects of the overall guidance offered to rural school districts during this era. It’s exterior “is simple and plain it has not been prepared in a haphazard manner. The proportions are carefully considered and to obtain the desired result the plans should be faithfully followed.”

The basic design called for an entrance at the gable end flanked by single double-hung windows, and a bank of windows on one side-gable elevation. On the interior, small cloakrooms were located on either side of the entrance, while a large single classroom filled the rest of the space.

With its banked west-facing windows, the Eagle Butte School builders ensured it would “be possible to flood the school room at some time during the day with bright sunlight.”³⁸ As later appeared in the Bulletin as the recommended standard, the windows were within one foot of the ceiling, and placed on one side of the room.³⁹

In addition, although simple in design and modest in scale, the school reflects modest residential styling, with its gently pitched gable roof, exposed rafter tails, multi-pane windows, and narrow-gauge lap siding. These design elements were popular in residential building during the early part of the twentieth century. “In their size, scale, materials and construction methods, country schools often resembled houses, especially on the frontier. The teacher and his or her charges were like a big family, further increasing the

³⁶ Plew, W.R. “One and Two Room Rural School Buildings,” University of Montanan Bulletin, State College Series No. 11, Bozeman, Montana, 1919, introduction.

³⁷ Plew, p. 7.

³⁸ Plew, p. 13.

³⁹ Plew, p. 13.

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association of schools with houses.”⁴⁰ Architectural Historian Kingston Heath comments on these domestic and religious architectural influences in school buildings:

the transition from a child’s home to an elementary school was softened by a home-like ambiance...Some of the earliest schools actually served combined functions of school house and church or meeting house. Because access to these small, insolated Montana schools generally required a long cold journey by horse or by foot, builders and users of the structures attempted to make the environment as inviting and familiar as possible by visually aligning them with domestic and religious structures.⁴¹

Very little has changed in the design of the Eagle Butte School since its construction and use during the historic period. In both form and function, the school stands as a testament to the history of the Eagle Butte community, as well as the standardized plans for public schools advocated across the country and the state of Montana during the late 1910s and early 1920s. Clearly, the Eagle Butte School is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places for its associations with the social and educational history of the rural community of Eagle Butte. It also gains significance as an excellent prototype of a modified “Plan C1” school, as advocated by architects and teachers across the country, and eventually embraced and recommended by the Montana State Board of Health and the Office of Public Instruction.

⁴⁰ Andrew Gulliford, *America’s Country Schools*, (Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1984), p. 159.

⁴¹ Kingston Heath, “A Dying Heritage: One-Room Schools of Gallatin County, Montana,” *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, Camille Wells, ed. (Annapolis, MD: Vernacular Architecture Forum, 1982), p. 207.

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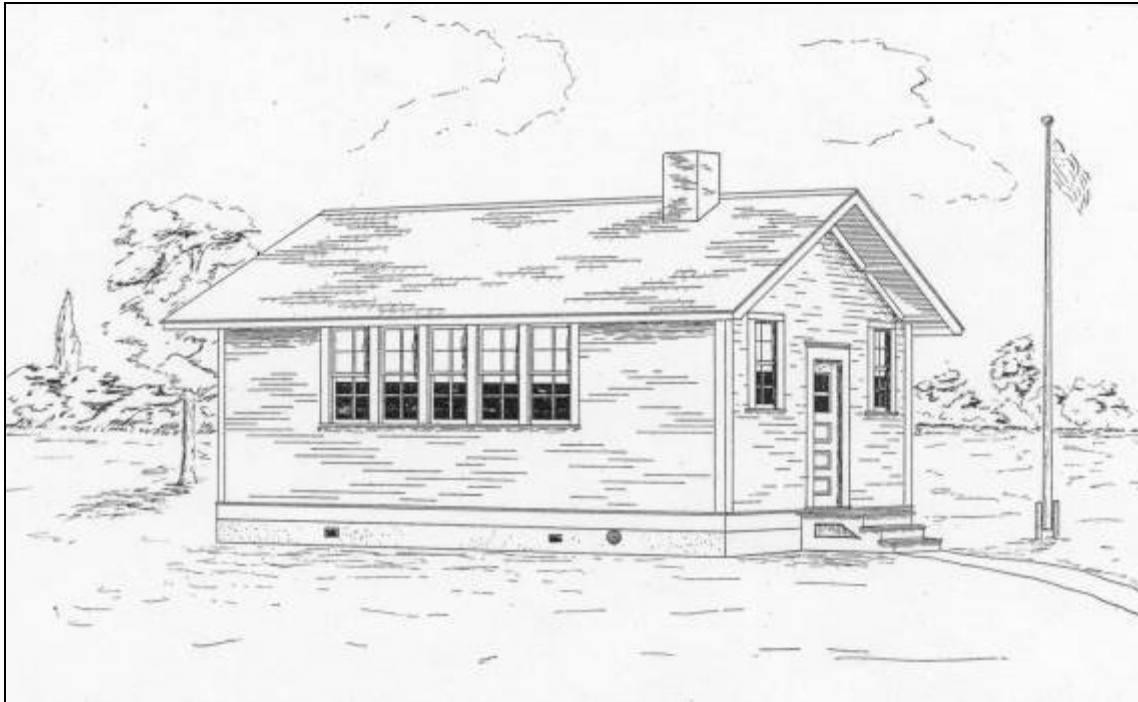
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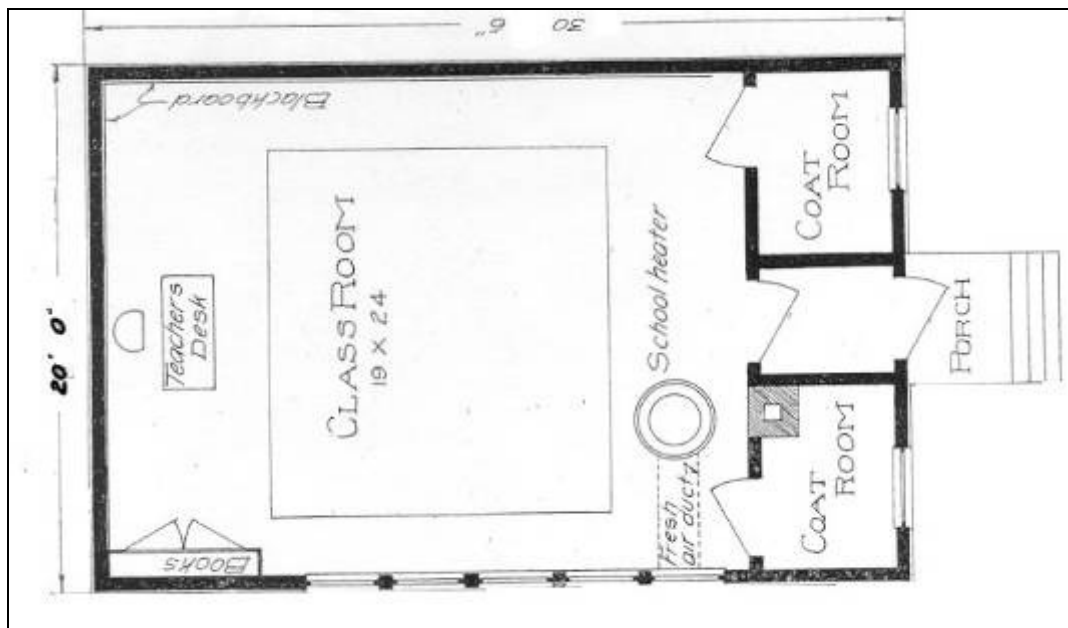
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General design of C1 type one-room rural school. Adapted from Plew (1919).



Plan drawing of C1 type one-room school layout. Adapted from Plew (1919).

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View looking SE at the Eagle Butte School on October 27, 2003.



View looking S at the Eagle Butte School on October 27, 2003.

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View looking SW at the Eagle Butte School on October 27, 2003.



View looking N at the Eagle Butte School on October 27, 2003.

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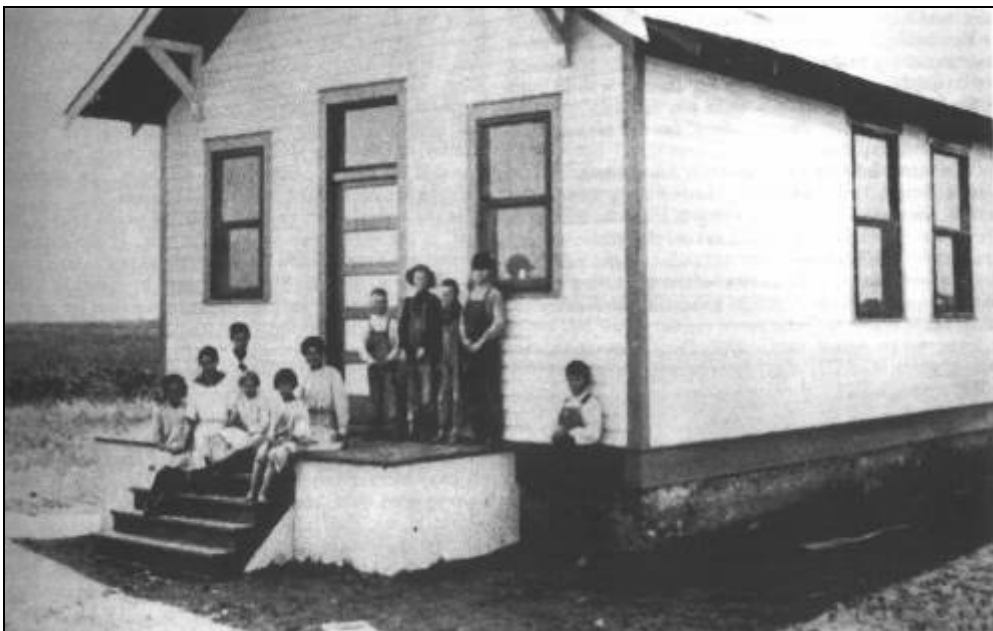
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View looking S inside the main room of the Eagle Butte School on October 27, 2003.



North Eagle Butte School in 1915. *Photo adapted from the Geraldine Historical Committee (1976).*

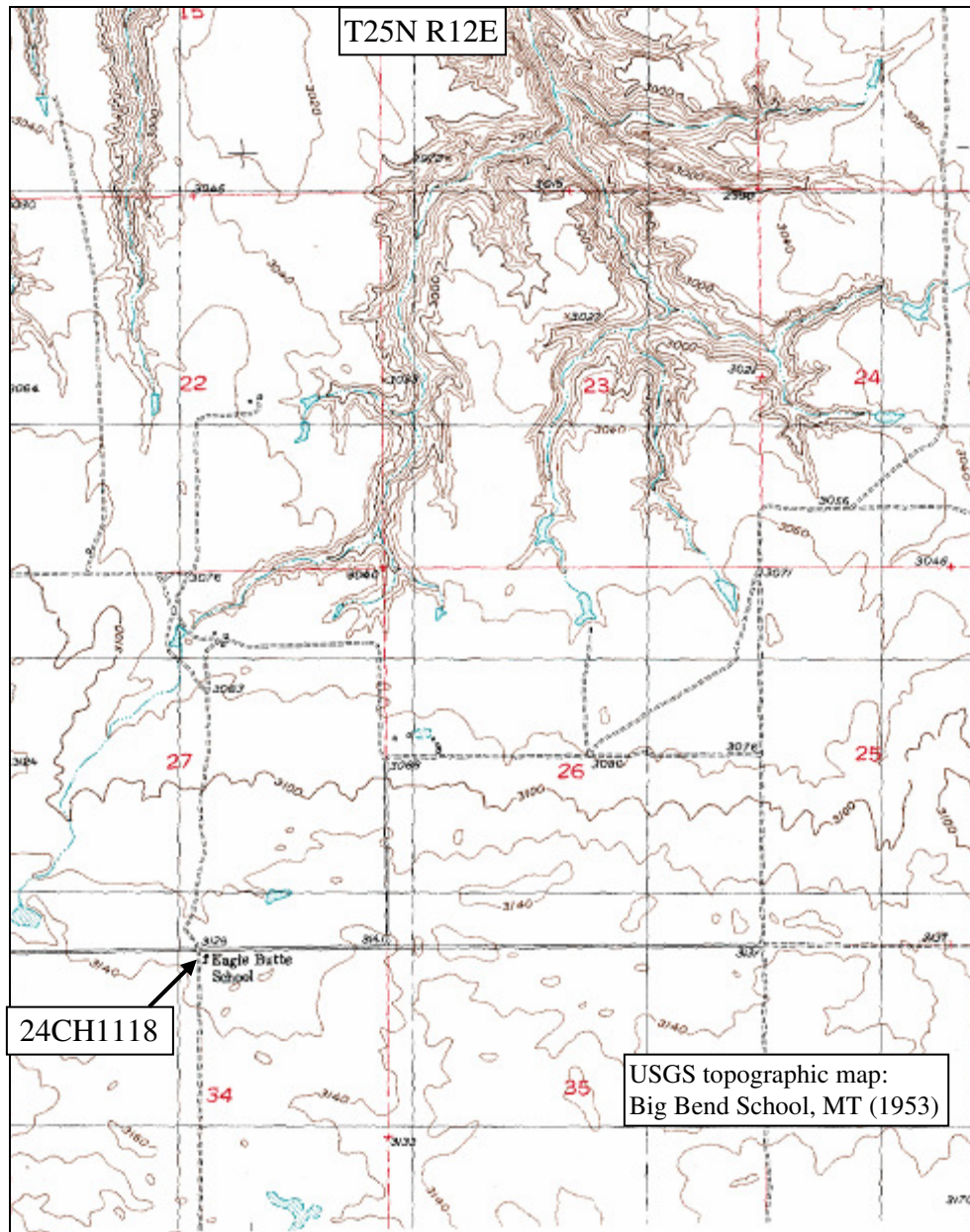
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Topographic map with the location of the Eagle Butte School (24CH1118) indicated.